



Natural and Spiritual Capitals and their Interaction

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Spiritual value as an ecosystem service

The economic metaphors of services and capital have been embraced by some in the environmental movement with, I judge, an air of desperation. 'How can we get the people who count to take our arguments seriously?' Answer: 'We must start counting ourselves.' The aim is to speak to big business and finance ministries in their own language. There are some successes here, but also worries. Is it economics or accounting that drives decisions; total welfare or the bottom line (accountants will be alert to the distinction)? And how well does the economic metaphor of capital really map onto real-world nature, or does it deform our ideas of nature in potentially damaging ways? If an economic approach to valuing nature is here to stay, what patterns of speaking do we need for other values to have their day in court. After all, the public wants a mixed approach to valuing nature.¹

I have been taking students to the Scottish island of Arran each year on a 'nature and spirit' field trip. Imagine my delight, then, at reading the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment² and discovering its frequent mention of the spiritual in its classification of ecosystem services. A word search across its multiple publications detected it 348 times. The Assessment's enthusiasm for 'ecosystem services' as a metaphor is rapidly being matched by that for 'natural capital'. There is a parallel increase in speaking of spiritual capital, but their combined use is very rare.³ So I am walking on thin ice, therefore, rather than along well-trodden paths.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment conceived the spiritual aspect of ecosystems in two main ways, both much influenced by the North American experience.

1. We recognise the spiritual relationship of indigenous peoples with sacred places and species and the use they may make of natural products in religious practices. There may be special sites such as Devil's Tower, in North America.⁴ Animals, such as the cow in India, may be held sacred. And nature may be harvested for feathers in headdresses or for gifts for the gods.
2. The American transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, stayed at Walden Pond in 1845 in the search for an authentic life close to nature.⁵ Many who write about ecosystem services, as heirs of Thoreau, belong to a culture wary of formal religion but which embraces the spiritual experiences obtained when walking or working in the wild. This 'recharging of batteries', as we might say in Britain, is a spiritual benefit ecosystems provide.

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment of 2011 attempted to characterise this benefit.⁶ Conceivably one could even put a price on it using travel-cost methods to estimate the revealed preference value of going on retreat in rural monasteries or, by hedonic pricing, to estimate the uplift on house prices near village churches.

In the Follow-On⁷ to the National Ecosystem Assessment, our team and I attempted to characterise the diversity of contexts in which spiritual aspects of nature are valued. I have highlighted just three below:

- a) Growing up in the Sussex countryside, one of my favourite events of the year was Rogation Sunday. We did not 'beat the bounds' in my parish, but we did go for a pilgrimage around key places in the village praying for good harvests. Later, as a country rector, the popularity of harvest festival, nature hymns such as 'All things bright and beautiful', and the tending of graves was obvious. Certainly a veneer of Christianity, but evidence also of persistent paganism.
- b) The British equivalent to American transcendentalism is Romanticism, with its emphasis on the spiritual over the religious. Wordsworth, observing daffodils beside Ullswater,⁸ has taught generations of us to connect with Nature, partly as an antidote to urban, industrial life. This is evidenced in charities that wish to protect an ideal countryside, and the practice of walking through nature.

1 Fish, R. and Saratsi, E. (2015) Naturally Speaking... A Public dialogue on the UK National Ecosystem Assessment. Final Report. CRPR, University of Exeter, Exeter.

2 World Resources Institute 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Island Press, Washington DC

3 judging by Google Scholar

4 Wild, R. and McLeod, C. (Editors) (2008). Sacred Natural Sites; Guidelines for Protected Area Managers. World Commission on Protected Areas; Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 16. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

5 Henry David Thoreau, 1854. Walsen; or, Life in The Woods. Boston, MA, Ticknor and Fields

6 Andrew Church, Jacquelin Burgess and Neil Ravenscroft, 2011. Ch 16 Cultural Services, in The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Technical Report. UK National Ecosystem Assessment, UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.

7 Kenter, J.O., Reed, M. S., Irvine, K.N., O'Brien, E., Brady, E., Bryce, R., Christie, M., Church, A., Cooper, N., Davies, A., Hockley, N., Fazey, I., Jobstovogt, N., Molloy, C., Orchard-Webb, J., Ravenscroft, N., Ryan, M., Watson, V. (2014) Shared, Plural and Cultural Values of Ecosystems. UK National Ecosystem Assessment follow-on phase, technical report. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.

8 William Wordsworth, 1815 revised edition I wandered lonely as a cloud.

c) A scientific approach to nature may seem paradoxical if described as spiritual. The Early Modern biologists, such as John Ray,⁹ were motivated in their science by their theological belief that God had written both the bible and nature, revelation was in both. Darwin may be construed as banishing God from this project, but the attempt to discover meaning and purpose through scientific study of natural history remains alive and well. Our major atheist theologians, if I may call them that, look to biology to establish their secularist belief about the world.

All three of these strands appreciate what nature provides by way of spiritual benefits. They also recognise human duties to nature, of both respect and care. The spiritual benefits just might fit within the economic concept of preference satisfaction; our duties to nature cannot.

More than that, nature's most profound 'ecosystem service' may be to put us humans in our place. It reminds us that we are a dispensable outcome of nature, more than ever nature is a sub-set of the human economic project. Nature, forever beyond human control, has the last word – long after the last human has died on Earth. Nature is transcendent, not a domesticated warm glow.

What does nature need to be like to perform these spiritual services? What natural capital is needed to perform them?

For science, we need biodiversity and ecosystems functioning with as little human interference as possible. That way we may analyse natural processes. This was the explicit motivation behind the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. National Nature Reserves were for studying nature and the Sites of Special Scientific Interest were for science.¹⁰ Experiments in regeneration and management in the Caledonian Forest are an example.¹¹

Romantics desire a diversity of untamed landscapes with little evidence of industry or modern agriculture; evidence of our early ancestors, contrariwise, is welcome. We may try to follow their footprints in search of an unmediated relationship to nature, though that would be to forget that humans always engage with the world around them through cultures of one sort or another.

And for Locals, for those still connected to the Christian and pagan culture of their past (as well as for those who have lost that connection in the modern world) it is a nature on everyone's doorstep that is needed. Plants and animals, gardens and pets, and the opportunity to grow food; and burial grounds in every community.

Yet, the more important question may be, 'What does our spiritual capital need to be like to appreciate our duty to nature?'

Spiritual capital as metaphor

The metaphor of spiritual capital has developed out of the metaphors of social and human capital.¹² In development economics it has gradually been realised that to get economic growth you need functioning institutions, but these in turn need underlying shared values such as trust (for markets) and a belief in innovation (for entrepreneurialism). Virtues such as trust and belief beg the use of the spiritual metaphor in a distinction from social capital that attends more to social institutions and practices. Claims are made that these virtues are correlated with the religious beliefs of a culture.¹³ Protestant Christianity was explored famously a century ago¹⁴ as laying these foundations for American capitalism, for instance; and the debate continues.¹⁵

Alternatively, others argue that human societies need a shared understanding of meaning and purpose, a spiritual understanding, if they are to function well.¹⁶ One reading of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*¹⁷ is that he presumes, as the context of the market he famously extols, a widespread attachment to the virtues. He sees an important role for religion in supporting this. Here markets are accountable to morality; high spiritual and moral capital promote justice in the structures and operation of markets.

9 J Ray 1691 *The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of Creation*

10 Nicholson, E.M. (1957) *Britain's Nature Reserves*. London, Country Life.

11 Scott McG Wilson, 2015. 'The native woodlands of Scotland' Edinburgh University Press; Jonathan W. Humphrey, 2006. *Ecology and management of native pinewoods: overview of special issue*. *Forestry* 79 (3): pp. 245-247 doi:10.1093/forestry/cpl012

12 TR Malloch 2014 'Spiritual Capital' Ch 24 (pp 462-471) in P Oslington (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics* OUP

13 PL Berger and G Redding (eds) 2011 *The Hidden Form of Capital: spiritual influences in societal progress*

14 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Penguin, 1905; RH Tawney 1926 *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*

15 Capaldi, N. N. and Malloch, T. R. 2012 *America's Spiritual Capital* St Augustine's Press, South Bend, Indiana

16 Danah Zohar, I. N. Marshall 2004 *Spiritual Capital: Wealth We Can Live by*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco CA

17 A Smith (1759) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

This provides an explanation for complexities that are observed in markets, such as: Some customers, at a cost to themselves, adhere to ethical principles in their purchases; Companies may attempt to construct brand images for their products that emphasise their moral credentials; The widespread acceptance that some environmental regulation is necessary, which will restrict what products can be brought to market.

However, there are some fruitful lines of application for 'spiritual capital'. Just as investment enables production by factories, so social investment in spiritual capital enables a society to achieve more. And investment in spiritual capital enables risk-taking and a positive view of the future. Yet this spiritual attitude to the future is the antithesis of discounting and depreciation. We need to keep alert to misleading extrapolations of these metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson¹⁸ explained how much of our thinking depends on metaphors, but also how we need to be alert to their unwarranted effects, where metaphors come to be unduly stretched. This 'capital' metaphor has weaknesses. For instance, spiritual capital cannot be possessed or traded, and much possessable natural capital is held in common. Spiritual capital is not fungible, and neither is 'critical natural capital'. It is hard to imagine how one might bring spiritual capital into financial accounting.

At the end of the day it is not the stock market that pronounces judgement on success and failure. From the earliest times, those who wished to operate dishonestly disbelieved in the gods, thereby hoping there would be no final giving of an account.¹⁹ In the rich parts of the world these days it is fashionable to doubt god's existence. Yet even without a god, many have a sense that nature is full of intrinsic value.²⁰ This mysterious and contested value is more easily conceived as the value nature has to the One who creates her and all who inhabit her.²¹ This is one way to answer Dario Kenner's question, 'Who should value nature?'²² For certain, it cannot just be those with financial clout.

It is not a question of 'What do I like? What are my preferences?', but of 'Where do I detect true value lies?' For this question we need those aspects of social and spiritual capital that provide the 'capacity' (a better metaphor than 'capital') to notice value in nature. At the individual human level this will include the cultivation of virtue, spiritual practices, and the exercise of care. As a society we need to nurture individual spirituality and recognise that generosity is needed alongside self-interest if the hidden hand is to work. Those closest to nature, often the economically poor but spiritually rich, can teach us most about how precious she is.

Of course, in Britain and much of the West, religion is declining^{23 24} (though nearly 60% of the English and Welsh population in the 2011 Census still said they were Christian). Meanwhile, one reading of the rise in Islam around the world is as a repudiation of Western, capitalist values. A further small percentage of people, perhaps 5%²⁵ in Britain, avers 'I'm spiritual, not religious'. This is often particularly associated with concern for nature. Of course, New Atheism is not necessarily 'un-spiritual' in its concern for sustainability. Richard Dawkins argues that we have the capacity to override our selfish genes with higher values.²⁶

So if there is reduction in spiritual capital, it has less to do with the decline in religion than with the rise in oft-lamented trends: Consumerism and retail therapy; Virtual living and a disconnect from people and nature; Sex, drugs and drink. These may be anaesthetics against alienation, inequality and a televised global world. However, the feeding of this addiction comes at the cost of the exploitation of people, nature and the future.

If we are to preserve and enhance natural capital we shall have to reduce consumption and reverse 'GDP Growth'.²⁷ For this to be acceptable to populations, we need a shift to a new set of values, values such as sufficiency, quality and fairness. There will need to be an emphasis on non-consumptive goods, ones that affirm human relationships and contact with nature. As the pope has written, 'We must recover the whole sense of gift, of gratuitousness, of solidarity. Rampant capitalism has taught the logic of profit at all costs, of giving to get, of exploitation without looking at the person... and we see the results in the crisis we are experiencing!'²⁸

18 G Lakoff and M Johnson (1980) *Metaphors we live by* University of Chicago Press

19 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.' Psalm 14 v.1 Authorised Version

20 Curry, P. 2011. *Ecological Ethics; an introduction* 2nd ed. Polity Press, Cambridge, UK

21 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.' Genesis 1 v.31 Authorised Version

22 D Kenner 2014 *Who should value nature?* ICAEW Outside Insights series

23 National Census data ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html

24 CG Brown (2009) *The Death of Christian Britain; understanding secularisation 1800-2000* Routledge 2ed

25 G Harvey and G Vincett 2012 'Alternative spiritualities; marginal and mainstream' Ch 4 (pp 156-172) in L. Woodhead and R Catto (eds) 2012 *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*. Routledge, London

26 Richard Dawkins: Our big brains can overcome our selfish genes. The Independent Tuesday 12 February 2002. independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/richard-dawkins--our-big-brains-can-overcome-our-selfish-genes-9263389.html

27 T Jackson (2009) *Prosperity without growth? The transition to a sustainable economy* Sustainable Development Commission

28 Francis, 2015. *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for Our Common Home* [English Language Version]. The Vatican.

This shift will rely on spiritual capital, which will need to be of sufficient capacity and quality for society to change direction. Religious institutions have a role, but a declining one. Businesses (encouraged by their accountants) can make significant investments in spiritual capital. They can talk up and really value spiritual capacities, such as trust, generosity and concern for the long-term, among their staff, customers and suppliers. The way in which they advertise their products can strengthen the spiritual dimension of the market. Product development and brand values can reinforce wider moral values. Companies can encourage the raising of regulatory standards.

For society as a whole we all can raise our ethical expectations and norms. We can educate the virtues, especially when uncertain outcomes throw calculations of future benefits into disarray. We can discover within and among us a spirit of sacrifice. We can widen the boundaries of our collective concern to encompass disenfranchised people, nature, and all who are yet to come. Whatever we believe in we can act in faith, hope and love.

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